

Rundown Home Backdrop In Utilities Transfer Push City Says Infrastructure Improvements Rest On Decision

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INDIANAPOLIS -- Mayor Greg Ballard and other leaders stood in front of an abandoned home on the city's north side Tuesday morning to renew a call for the approval of a plan that would transfer the city's water and waste utilities to Citizens Energy Group.

Ballard said the \$1.9 billion plan's approval would provide money to fix roads, sidewalks and tear down abandoned homes.

The mayor stood in front of a decrepit home in the 800 block of Eugene Avenue to provide a dramatic backdrop to make his case.

The transfer would provide up to \$400 million to begin fixing crumbling streets, many left in poor condition after a harsh winter.

"Let there be no more excuses. Let there be no more political posturing. Let there be no more delay," Ballard said. "The time to rebuild Indy is now."

Ballard said that if the transfer is approved, some of the repairs can begin this summer.

"It's a good plan if he's not going to raise taxes," said Jim Jones, who lives near Guion Road, a hotbed of driver complaints. "I'm all for that if we can get the roads paved."

Still, city official said the project won't fix all of Indianapolis' woes.

"It's not going to solve everything," said Larry Jones, an engineer for the Department of Public Works. "Our problems are a lot bigger than this."

The Board of Waterworks, Board of Public Works, City-County Council and Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission must approve the plan for it to take effect.

Ballard said the transfer to Citizens would help blunt massive rate increases set to take place within the next decade.

The city's utilities currently have \$1.5 billion in debt.

Critics have said that the city would relinquish too much control of utilities if the plan is approved and that oversight would be lax.

There have been several public meetings, and more are scheduled for this week and next.

Indianapolis' water system serves more than 300,000 homes in Marion County and six surrounding counties. About 230,000 homes are served by the wastewater system.

<http://www.theindychannel.com/news/23517910/detail.html>